

I wanted to follow up on my [previous e-update](#) regarding the Department of Veterans Affairs Oakland Regional Office. As you may know, despite past promises from the VA to improve the backlog at the Oakland office, service to our veterans has continued to deteriorate. In late March, I organized a meeting with VA Under Secretary for Benefits Allison Hickey, whose responsibilities include the Oakland office, and I invited a bipartisan group of Northern California members of Congress to join me in expressing strong concern about the ongoing delays. We considered several methods for improving Oakland's performance, including providing additional training for the Oakland staff, arranging increased contact with Congressional offices, and sending some pending claims to other regional offices for processing. I wanted to share the [letter](#) General Hickey sent after the meeting, confirming that she will enact reforms that we discussed.

The Oakland office desperately needs this improvement. It is one of the slowest regional offices in the nation; in December 2011, it had over 30,000 pending claims. On average, it takes the Oakland office almost nine months to process a veteran's original disability claim, and an expedited Notice of Disagreement (NOD) case takes 240 days, over four months above the target processing time and two months longer than the national average. While I am encouraged by the proposals that General Hickey has described, I will continue to closely monitor this situation and to encourage the Oakland office to process the claims of Northern California veterans in a timely manner.